

Ruskin Park Primary School, a true community spirit

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TENDER BRIDGE CASE OF SUCCESS: CASE 8

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Ruskin Park Primary School has been a Tender Bridge subscriber for a year, since two parents from the school, Lisa Dalmau and Ajne Graham, attended Tender Bridge's 'Grantseeking for Success' professional learning program in May 2012. As the only parent participants in that program, they felt that grantseeking was the best way that they could contribute to the school. In discussions with the school principal, Elle May, Lisa talked to Tender Bridge about the school's success in resourcing its ideas.



Grant money was used to buy tools, equipment, soil, plants and other materials for the school's vegetable garden.

About Ruskin Park Primary School

Ruskin Park Primary School is located in Croydon, in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Parent participation is highly valued and parents are encouraged to become members of the Families and Friends Network and School Council. The school has a student population of 345. The diverse school community includes a growing number of Burmese refugees, and families from many parts of the world. In recent times parents new to the school have demonstrated an interest in becoming more involved in the life of the school than in the past, and this has been encouraged as a welcome change.

What gets supported?

The school has found that they have generally won support, either funding or in-kind, for items or projects where a benefit could be

demonstrated to the whole of the school community, and in some instances the broader local community. "Items where we could demonstrate that they may have more than one use appear to be viewed favourably," says Lisa (parent).

What grantseeking successes have you had?

Australian Government Volunteer Small Equipment Grant: \$5,000

The money was used to purchase a marquee with the school colours and logo for use by volunteers at schools events, students/staff in the choir as shelter when performing in the community, and to promote our school at events held both on school grounds and in the local community. Also purchased were two barbecues for volunteer use at school fetes and other functions, as well as chairs for volunteers to use on sports days and when helping in the classroom. Garden tools and equipment



L to R: Ruskin Park Primary School principal Elle May Laikve and parent Lisa Dalmau

are used in the weekly children's Garden Club as well as at working bees. "This means we don't have to fund these things out of our school budget," says Lisa.

NRMA Road Safety Grant: \$2,000

This was for a community safety bike education grant framed as an 'anti-obesity' initiative. The application incorporated statistics on obesity, how far people in the area drive to school and associated emissions levels. Bikes and safety helmets were funded and the program, which was initially for Grades 5 and 6, has now been expanded to include Grade 4. The project aims to encourage more students to walk or ride to school, reduce car traffic, noise and pollution around the school entrance, and to encourage kids to exercise more given modern-day obesity trends.

iPrimus Community Grant: \$500

This grant was used to cover the cost of an incursion evening with Scientwists as part of the 2012 Science Fair. A range of scientific items of interest were on display during the Fair and the evening concluded with a 20-minute stage show that thrilled and delighted the children in the audience.

ResourceSmart Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative – Core Module: \$10,000

Ruskin Park received funding for their first AuSSI ResourceSmart Sustainable Schools module. As a flow-on from being a new school to the Sustainable Schools Program, they have now been invited to apply for an additional \$10,000 funding. If successful, this funding would be spent on first obtaining an energy efficiency audit at the school, with the remainder spent on energy saving initiatives such energy-efficient lighting throughout the main school building.

Coles Junior Landcare: \$1,100

The school was also awarded \$1,100 for its vegetable garden program.

How do you fare with in-kind support?

Most in-kind donations received have been in conjunction with larger school events, such as the Science Fair held last year, and the school fete. The donor receives the benefits of advertising and the goodwill that comes with such a donation. Lisa says, "For our Science Fair, we approached the community for in-kind contributions from people in the community who donated their time and expertise. The Lilydale Police Forensic Unit came along and demonstrated fingerprinting, and set up a mock house break-in and robbery crime scene. As a result of approaching the Head of Medical Science at Monash University, we were loaned five high-powered microscopes to view samples of blood and micro-organisms. These microscopes were operated by scientists from Monash Medical Centre, who also donated the slides for the microscopes, along with their time and expertise."

The school was loaned a generator to power their rides at the fete, and heavy-duty reusable *Ramboard* from a local business, Altamonte, to cover and protect the gym floor during the Science Fair.

Says Lisa, "We approached the business personally to ask for either a donation or to provide the material at a reduced cost. They've now donated the floor covering on two occasions, because they like to support the local community. Ceres Environmental Park supplied an electric car for display at our Science Fair, and Maroondah City Council arranged for talks on sustainability options. Local estate agent, Barry Plant Croydon, supplied and erected advertising boards for the event. We also liaised with Melba College, a local secondary college, and the head of science came along and presented a display and talked

about high school science programs. From our community, we also had someone who came along with her lizards!”

The school has also received heavily discounted food for their barbecue events as well as a fixed percentage of proceeds from attending coffee van sales.

“Your seminar gave us the confidence to go out and ask people.”

As well as going out and asking people, how do find the resources to support your ideas?

Lisa says that she uses the Tender Bridge database, and finds the [LLEAP case studies](#) particularly helpful. “I find them helpful not only because they are all in one place, but also because they give me even more ideas for grants.”

Lisa sources grants from a number of sources, some she already knows about, and some she comes across for the first time. “I have my own system. Now we have more of a direction going forward, it’s good to know when new grant rounds are going to open. I have a calendar of grants now, and I have an alert set on my computer for when they open.”

“Sometimes I call or email funders directly and ask when new funding rounds are likely to be open.”

The Tender Bridge professional learning helped us to develop connections with people from other schools. We’ve stayed in touch with some of them and can find out about what each of us are doing. In the professional learning, I heard about ideas that I might not have been able to come up with myself.

Why do you think your grantseeking has been so successful?

Elle May (principal) and Lisa agree that there is great support, communication and connection between school leadership and parents. Elle says, “We value parents’ input and direction for our community. Everyone’s involved.” Parents share their skills and so the community is able to leverage the skills that are already there in the parent group.

What projects are on the table going forwards?

“We are exploring a Master Plan for our garden and grounds, so we’d like to find some resources for the different parts of that,” says Lisa.

“We would also like to develop up some stronger partnerships. We have a good relationship with the RSL, a special relationship. We celebrate an Anzac Day service with them, and sometimes more, also with Rotary—they are both ongoing relationships, but we’d like to do more.”

How do parents know they are valued?

As a parent at Ruskin Park Primary School, Lisa says she has always felt valued and included by the school and its teaching staff. “Elle May and various teachers frequently take the time to thank me (and other parents) for any efforts we make in terms of grants, and also in other areas of the school where I assist from time to time. Teachers are always happy to make time for a chat in relation to projects or ideas that they would like to see funded at school. They explain the curriculum and educational focus to me in relation to their projects because I am not from a teaching background. I also feel valued in other ways. Since we received funding for our core module in the Sustainable Schools Program, our school has undertaken a number of professional development sessions at school facilitated by CERES. Another parent and I have both been invited to participate in these sessions with teaching staff, and I am

extremely grateful for this, a rare privilege. Parents have also attended professional development sessions (such as the Tender Bridge Grant-seeking For Success professional learning) as representatives of the school.”

“Parents also feel valued at school by the level of trust and respect shown by teachers towards parents in a number of roles. For example, a small group of parents have formed a committee this year and are organising the Trivia Night fundraiser independently of teaching staff. After each meeting we report back to Elle May so that she is kept informed at all times of our progress.”

The principal and other teachers express their thanks to parents who have assisted at school in the school newsletter, on the school website and at school assemblies.

As a parent, Lisa, what are the personal benefits of what you do for the school?

“The people you meet. The more you talk to people, the more you find out how much support is out there. I like the networking and talking to people and it helps me to get to know my children’s school. I work four days a week, so this keeps me in touch. It’s my way of contributing.”

Elle May adds, “The other flow on comes from organised school events and projects that get our school’s name and brand out into the community. The Local Leader has started to cover more of our events. Parents come along to hear about what we do. We had our school fete on the local radio station. What people like Lisa do is contagious. When they become involved and excited, so do others. Instead of just attending activities organised by the school, the parents start running activities themselves. I see that people do want to help one another and it’s important to push that message—people really do want to make a difference.”

Next year is the school’s 50th anniversary, so Elle May and Lisa are hoping that the many connections they are making will stand the school in good stead for whatever is planned to commemorate the occasion.

Lisa’s grantseeking tips

- *Acknowledge that grants are not a quick fix, it’s an ongoing process*
- *Have a wish list of what you want, for grants for small, medium and large amounts, so when a grant comes along you can match it to what you have.*
- *Don’t waste time pursuing a grant that isn’t really a good fit. Look at what was previously funded – see what has been funded in the past so you can save time by considering if the grant is right for you.*
- *When you apply for grants, have a conversation with whoever’s involved at the school end. Everyone must be familiar with the process, requirements and responsibilities such as reporting and acquittal so that the task is manageable.*